

Homeopathy under Examination

I've gathered two books that promote homeopathy as an alternative to conventional medicine. Homeopathy Made Simple, by Dr. R. Donald Papon and Rage-Free Kids: Homeopathic Medicine for Defiant, Aggressive and Violent Children, by Judyth and Reichenberg-Ulman and Robert Ulman. I'm going to analyze the claims made by these authors and attempt to prove them wrong

Before I move on, let me inform the readers of the most basic concept of homeopathy. In a nutshell, the concept of The Law of Similars states is "like cures like". For an example, if you have insomnia then a dosage of caffeine is supposed to help you sleep. If you have a rash the poison ivy may be a candidate for the treatment. Do not laugh; this is one of the main pillars of homeopathy. To make things more bizarre, the more you dilute a substance, the stronger it gets. I will explain this belief in further detail later in this essay.

In Homeopathy Made Simple, on page 176, Dr. R. Donald Papon makes the following claim about Hahnemann, "*Bothered by the all-too-often accepted habit of using drugs in excess (sounds familiar doesn't it?)*". Well, in that time frame, it doesn't sound familiar at all! During Hahnemann's time, around the late 1700s and early 1800s, little was known about human biology and the nature of diseases. In fact, medical science during that time was guesswork based on the idea of the body having four "bodily humors", which are black bile, yellow bile, flem and blood. Bloodletting, among other things including homeopathy, was one of the many procedures which attempted to balance these "bodily humors". Using drugs in excess was, to my knowledge, not the norm during this time.

In page 177, Dr. Papon quotes, "*a surprising report in 1992*", without mentioning the source of this report, "*noted that some 15 percent of Americans visit alternative therapists for which they pay more out-of-pocket expenses then they do to conventional primary care givers.*" Well, so much for the circulating claim that alternative medicine

makes less money than conventional medicine, if the above claim was true of course. But here is where it gets amusing, “*In 1995, this category grew by 19 percent with an estimated*”, drum roll please, “*1 percent of the population using homeopathy!*” Now, not only is this a bandwagon appeal, it’s not a very good one. Obviously, 1 percent of the population who uses homeopathy is hardly a number to go parading with, and yet Dr. Papon uses this number anyway.

Dr. Papon then writes on page 178, “*A homeopath looks at people as people, rather than diseases, and uses remedies that bolster the whole person rather than just treat symptoms.*” But in the next statement! “*For instance, if you have the flu your homeopath will need to know the time of day you felt better or worse, your appetite or thirst, your general mood, and how you are sleeping.*” When I’m sick, I know when it happened and how it feels. When you tell your homeopath about these things, he **IS** making a diagnosis of the disease based on the information that you have given him, just like an ordinary doctor. So, what point is Papon trying to make here? “*...unlike orthodox drug treatment, in homeopathy there are 30 to 40 remedies one may think of when you say ‘I have the flu!’.*” For the orthodox drug treatment that I was administered when I had the flu, the number of drugs that I had to choose from was smaller than the number of homeopathic treatments that Papon proposes, usually 3 to 4. Why would homeopaths need that many remedies to treat the same disease? Oh wait, I forgot, they’re looking at the people and not the diseases themselves. So far, homeopathy seems to be in some hot water.

Now, on page 179 Dr. Papon claims that, “*generally patients feel better soon after initial treatment has begun.*” If this is so then single-blind, double-blind, or any other science based studies should prove this to be true but, Dr. Papon doesn’t provide us with a study or a source for his claim. Secondly, there is a phenomenon called the placebo effect which could explain why patients taking homeopathic treatments would feel better. To explain in detail, the placebo effect is a psychological occurrence where the patient believes that a treatment he/she is receiving would make him/her feel better. As a consequence, this belief can create a temporary relief of symptoms but, in most

cases, doesn't cure the patient. This is why placebos are used in double-blind clinical trials.

On the subject of dilution in homeopathy, in pages 181-183, Dr. Papon talks about how homeopathic remedies are made and how they work. This quote in page 182 seems a little strange *"A rule of thumb is that the lower the number in either series the closer the remedy is to the mother tincture or its essential material form. The higher the number in either series, i.e. 1M or LM, the remedy consists of less matter and more energy or spirit which has been liberated by the dilution and succession process."* It sounds more like an appeal to metaphysics than to science. As far as my understanding goes, vague words like "energy" or "spirit" are never used in medical terminology.

On page 182, Dr. Papon makes another claim that, *"According to the Italian physicist, Avogadro, there should be no trace of the original atoms or molecules at this point, and yet the "imprint" of the original substance has been found to remain."* First, a little bit of background on Avogadro's number. Avogadro's number gives us an estimation of the amount of atoms or molecules in a substance.

Secondly, any dilution that is beyond Avogadro's number is considered pure enough to be chemically pure. This is not the same thing as having absolutely no atoms or molecules of the original substance. It just means that it would be too difficult, and impractical, to try to find any of them. Besides, if Dr. Papon found an "imprint" of the remaining substance in a homeopathic remedy or water in this case, it would be an amazing find. Of course, once again the doctor failed to provide a source where, under rigorous testing, an "imprint" was found in a homeopathic remedy. It seems safe to assume that homeopathy is based entirely on this principle of water maintaining a memory or a "spiritual imprint" of the substance, along with "like cures like".

I'm now moving on to another group of authors who try to explain away the deep flaws within homeopathy. Enter [Rage-Free Kids: Homeopathic Medicine for Defiant](#),

Aggressive and Violent Children, by Judyth and Reichenberg-Ulman and Robert Ulman. Now, I'm skipping ahead to chapter 20 and analyzing the Q&A.

The first question that caught my attention, located in page 263, was "*How will I know whether the homeopathic medicine is working?*" The authors responded, "*Within four to eight weeks, your child will begin to feel better in general, start being less negative...and if you are lucky, become a wonderful helper around the house.*" Now, I'm no child psychologist, but I think that the very act of showing attention to a child will make him/her friendlier, less hostile and, in the words of the author, "*feel better in general*". I don't think that one needs to resort to homeopathy, or any other alternative medicines, to cure their child of their aggression, nor is it necessary to resort to drugs, such as Ritalin, for every single child that displays acts of rebellion. For most of the time, it's usually a psychological cause and it's also normal. Ask any psychiatrist about child behavior and you will get the same answer.

On page 76, the authors confirm the basis of homeopathy, "*It has been proposed that water molecules are able to arrange themselves in liquid crystals that could retain a memory of the original substance and that these crystals actually multiply when the solution is shaken.*" Again, if this claim was true, it would be seen in clinical trials across the globe. Unfortunately, for the homeopaths, reality speaks a different tale.

In a frail attempt to justify the magical base of homeopathy, the authors create a fictional scenario in page 77, "*Just for a moment, allow yourself to entertain the possibility that the homeopaths are correct and the chemists are as yet unable to explain why. What would this mean? For one thing, it means that we are dealing with a medicine that is not simply physical and chemical in its nature or its effects. This frees homeopathy from necessarily abiding by the known laws of chemistry and physics and perhaps allows it to inhabit a new territory in scientific thought.*" (If anyone has a copy of this book, note the bold title on that page, "The Willing Suspension of Disbelief"). Well, in such a scenario it can work, but it's still a hypothetical scenario. I could make the same claim that, for example, all astronomers are wrong and that the earth is the

center of our universe. Everyone from Galileo to Carl Sagan would be wrong if, and only if, the earth is indeed the center of our universe. Unfortunately, for the geocentric model that thrived during the Dark Ages, this isn't true. A hypothetical scenario is a hypothetical scenario. It does not elevate your hypothesis that homeopathy is a boon to medicine or that the sun revolves around the earth.

In conclusion, the metaphysical and paranormal claims for homeopathy are as strong as other non-science based medicines such as faith healing, crystal healing, bloodletting, naturopathy etc. This is one of the many reasons why these kinds of claims are not accepted in science based medicine.

Sources:

Homeopathy Made Simple, by Dr. R. Donald Papon

Rage-Free Kids: Homeopathic Medicine for Defiant, Aggressive and Violent Children,
by Judyth and Reichenberg-Ulman and Robert Ulman

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<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3404200397.html>

<http://www.skeptdic.com/homeo.html>

James Randi Explaining homeopathy:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWE1tH93G9U>